

12-28-2016

The Way We Were: Discover the secret history and dynamic pasts of four DePaul buildings

Follow this and additional works at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/depaul-magazine>



Part of the [Architecture Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

(2016) "The Way We Were: Discover the secret history and dynamic pasts of four DePaul buildings," *DePaul Magazine*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 412018 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/depaul-magazine/vol1/iss412018/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Alumni Publications at Via Sapientiae. It has been accepted for inclusion in DePaul Magazine by an authorized editor of Via Sapientiae. For more information, please contact digitalservices@depaul.edu.

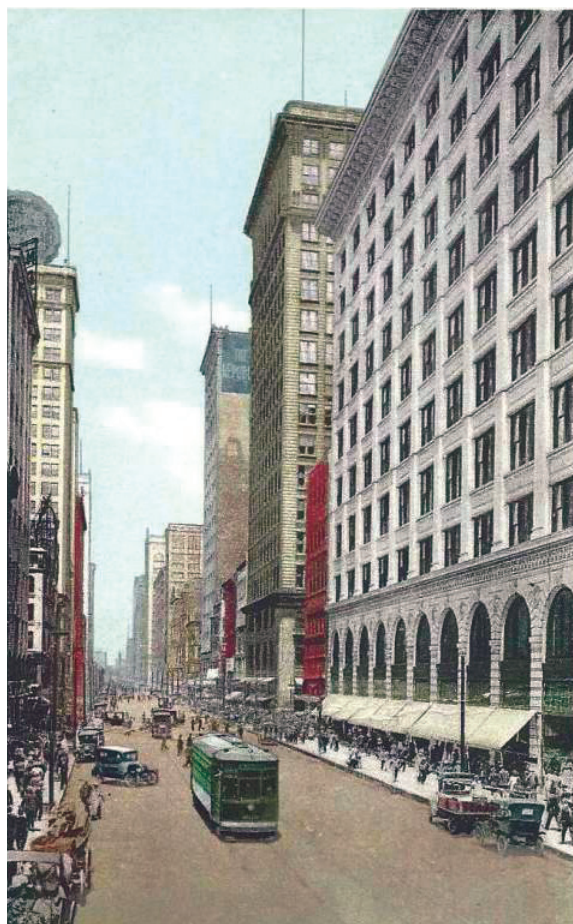


The Way We Were

**Discover the secret history and dynamic
pasts of four DePaul buildings.**

By Kelsey Schagemann

This interior image of the Lewis Center melds the way it looks today with the way it appeared in 1915. Vintage illustration courtesy of DePaul Special Collections and Archives.



Picture downtown Chicago. Now replace the cars with Ford Model T's and a few horse-drawn buggies, substitute felt fedoras for baseball hats and imagine all the women in long silk dresses. Your transportation to the Windy City circa 1915 is almost complete. To finish the journey, bring along some of the buildings you may know well from your days at DePaul: the Lewis Center, CDM Center and DePaul Center in the Loop, and the 990 Building in Lincoln Park. Their collective histories paint a vibrant portrait of life in Chicago not long after the turn of the century.

The DePaul Center

1 E. Jackson Blvd.

The original tenants of what is now known as the DePaul Center might smile to see the constant stream of people flowing in and out of the building—just as they used to when it was the Rothschild & Co. department store, beckoning customers to spend their hard-earned wages on various sundries. While the store began as a series of small buildings, the company's success prompted founder A.M. Rothschild to dream ever bigger. In 1911, he hired renowned architectural firm Holabird & Roche to design a steel-frame, 10-story, blocklong building covered in terra-cotta. If you look, you can still see the letter "R" emblazoned in medallions on the west and south facades.

In 1936, the building changed hands for the first time, becoming the flagship location for another department store,

Goldblatt's, which specialized in low prices. Unfortunately, by the early 1980s, Goldblatt's sales had declined drastically and bankruptcy was imminent. The City of Chicago purchased the building in 1982, and it stood vacant until DePaul bought the structure in 1991. Two years later, with renovations complete, the DePaul Center became the anchor for the university's downtown campus.

The building won the Best Renovation/Adaptive Reuse award from the Landmark Preservation Council of Illinois in 1994, and it's also listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Today, the DePaul Center houses the Driehaus College of Business, the Loop branch of the library, multiple administrative offices, a massive Barnes & Noble, and various restaurants and small businesses.

Lewis Center

25 E. Jackson Blvd.

Do the students bent over their College of Law casebooks ever hear a faint, sonorous melody? If so, it could be the ghostly echoes of the piano manufacturer that once resided in this grand old building. Built in 1916 for the W.W. Kimball Piano Co., the 16-story high-rise featured a 500-seat recital hall on the second and third floors. The architectural firm responsible for the design was none other than Graham, Burnham & Co., led by the sons and former partner of the famed Daniel Burnham, whose Burnham Plan outlined a vision for urban growth in Chicago. Perhaps his heirs are to blame for the Lewis Center's notoriously slow elevators.

William Wallace Kimball

founded his piano manufacturing facility in 1857, eventually growing the company into an international concern that was the largest piano manufacturer in the world from the late 1800s until the 1930s. The Great Depression hit the company hard, and attempts to revive the company during World War II through Department of War contracts—presumably not for pianos—proved unsuccessful.

Later, the building was acquired by the Frank J. Lewis Foundation, which donated the structure to DePaul in October 1955. This gift, which included the land on which the building stands, was the largest gift the university had received up to that point.



Image courtesy of DePaul Special Collections and Archives



Image courtesy of John Chuckman

CDM Center

243 S. Wabash Ave.

The CDM Center also boasts a musical past. The Lyon & Healy building went up kitty-corner to the W.W. Kimball Piano Co. during the same year, 1916. Although Lyon & Healy's flagship store sold uprights and grands in a beautiful series of glass-walled rooms, the company was better known for its elegant harps.

George Washburn Lyon and Patrick J. Healy designed their first harp in 1889, a quarter century after founding the company. "Let us build a harp that will no longer worry its owner because of its liability to get out of order easily," Healy said. "Let us build a harp that will go around the world without loosening a screw." The fifth floor of their store featured special sales rooms for the Lyon & Healy harp.

The harp undoubtedly sounded especially fantastic in the building's concert hall, which the Music Trade Review called "an acoustical triumph" in its review of the new building on July 19, 1916. Patrons could

also stop in to buy violins, band instruments, sheet music, music books and Victrolas and Victor records from the Victor Talking Machine Co.

Architecturally, the Lyon & Healy building looked as luminous as its harps. The dual entrances on Jackson Boulevard and Wabash Avenue featured walnut detailing, white marble, gold leaf and white enamel, and the marble and walnut motif continued throughout the corridors. Meanwhile, the Italian Renaissance-inspired facade—still apparent in the Corinthian columns on the top floors—was faced with pink granite and gray terra-cotta, though only the beige-gray color remains today.

DePaul acquired the building in 1981. Today, it serves as the home for the College of Computing and Digital Media. Eagle-eyed pedestrians and determined 'L riders can still spot a "ghost sign" painted on the building's northwest corner: "Lyon & Healy | Everything Known in Music."



Associate Professor Patrick McHaffie owns a 40-year-old drafting set made by the Eugene Dietzgen Co.

990 Building

990 W. Fullerton Ave.

The 990 Building is surely the only DePaul facility emblazoned with giant drafting instruments, including a T-square, a divider and two triangles. If these vivid symbols of its former life don't provide enough context, the letters and numbers arcing above provide another clue: Eugene Dietzgen Co. 1906.

Now a historic landmark, the 990 Building was formerly a manufacturing plant for drawing materials, surveying instruments and related tools produced by the Eugene Dietzgen Co., currently in its 131st year of operation. The eponymous founder arrived in the United States from Germany in 1880, started his own engineering and supply house in Chicago in 1885 and opened his first manufacturing plant in 1893.

A company catalog dated June 1, 1907, announced the opening of the latest plant with pride: "To meet the constantly growing demand for our products, our manufacturing facilities have been more than doubled by the erection of a new model manufacturing plant at Chicago. This we have equipped with the most modern appliances, in order

to secure the highest degree of perfection in the goods produced by us."

Patrick McHaffie, associate professor of geography and sustainable urban development, still owns one of these perfected goods, a drafting set he acquired four decades ago. "It was given to me in my first cartographic drafting class, and even at that time, I recognized that these types of instruments were old, and, in a sense, obsolete," he remembers. "In particular, the ruling pens were very difficult to use as they would only hold 2-3 drops of ink at a time, and the width of the line was determined by a very tedious set screw on the head." While he quickly replaced the pens, McHaffie does remember using the compasses.

Fittingly, McHaffie's office is located in the 990 Building, which DePaul purchased in 2005 after renting space in the building for four years. "I never forgot the mappers I had met early in my career who had spent their lives making maps using tools like those from the Dietzgen factories, nor did I forget the culture that was lost in our rush to digitize everything," McHaffie says.



A Brief History of Seton Hall

An alley-spanning bridge connected the Dietzgen Co. manufacturing facilities to another of its buildings directly to the north. Constructed in 1929, the building remained in the Dietzgen Co.'s possession

until 1975. Seven years later, the Allied Glove Company moved in. Their factory lasted until 1988, at which point DePaul purchased the building, converting it into student housing in May 1989. Today, Seton Hall, located at 2425 N. Sheffield Ave., features a campus bookstore on the ground floor and three stories of dorm rooms above.